LANCASTER - For the first time since the city started mapping crime, June had one full week with no districts reporting more than five serious crimes in a week.

During the week beginning June 12, there were fewer than six serious - or Part 1 - crimes reported in each of the high-crime areas, said Jim Kobolt, the city's senior criminal justice analyst. "Part 1" is a term used by the FBI and police agencies nationwide in reference to homicides, rapes, robberies, aggravated assaults, burglaries, larceny, vehicle thefts and arson.

"I've got some pretty good news today. I think everyone will like it," Kobolt said Wednesday when he presented his crime report to the Lancaster Criminal Justice Commission.

The crime wave began a downward trend lately in certain categories, such as robberies and residential burglaries, according to the report. That doesn't mean Lancaster is crime-free, just on the decline.

He emphasized that the numbers he reported are preliminary figures, not the final numbers submitted for the FBI's Uniform Crime Report.

"In order to plan strategically, we have to look at some numbers," Kobolt said. His report helps city officials and local law enforcement manage the higher crime areas, he explained.

Kobolt noted certain crimes are still showing an upward trend, resulting from criminal activity that occurred 10 or more weeks ago in his 52-week study.

For instance, residential burglaries saw "a big spike 20 weeks ago."

Overall, Kobolt told the six commissioners, his report contained some favorable information regarding the six-week period from May 29 through July 9.

During that period, in the six most active reporting districts, a total of 216 serious crimes occurred, out of a total of 363 serious crimes throughout the city.

In 2000, Lancaster had between 350 and 375 serious crime reports for a one-month period. Kobolt noted that the 363 figure was for six weeks, meaning crimes occurred more frequently 11 years ago.

"We are below where we were in 2000," he said, noting that crime peaked in November 2006, when more than 600 Part 1 crimes were reported.

Kobolt compared June of this year to July. In June the weekly average was 67 crime
reports. In July, it dropped to 60.5 crimes a week.

Reporting districts 1135 and 1137, with 46 serious crimes each in those six weeks, top the list.

Reporting District 1135 is on both sides of Avenue J, from 20th Street East to roughly Fifth Street East. Reporting District 1137 is between 20th and 30th streets East, south of Avenue J to approximately Avenue K.

"It's not random, some of the things occurring in the same place over and over again," Kobolt said.

Crime in those reporting districts "gets to be consistent, week to week, month to month," the criminal justice analyst said.

"Lancaster covers 90 square miles. The actual crime area occurs in 10 miles or less," Kobolt said.

From Challenger Way to 20th Street East, between avenues J and K, "that's where the high density (of crime) is," he emphasized.

In Reporting District 1137, Kobolt said, "residential burglary led the way."

Reporting District 1126 is third in line on the high-crime density charts. That district is around Avenue K and 10th Street West.

A "lot of larceny" - or theft - occurs there, according to Kobolt.

Regarding thefts from vehicles between May 29 and July 9, Kobolt said Chevrolets headed the target list with seven incidents, and Hondas came in second with six. During that time, a total of 38 thefts from vehicles occurred. Other makes on the list included Jeeps, Chryslers, Dodges, Fords, Nissans and Toyotas.

In 71% of the cases, the culprit gained entrance through an unlocked door or open window. In only two cases did the culprit shatter a vehicle window, Kobolt noted. In one case, the perpetrator punched out the door lock.

Of 38 thefts during the six-week period, 13 occurred in residential driveways, 10 in public parking lots, seven on residential streets, seven in apartment parking lots and one on a commercial street.

"One bit of advice," Kobolt said. "Roll your windows up all the way. Also, lock your doors."

A car window open even a crack "gives somebody an opportunity to grab hold of that window and force it down," he said. Furthermore, he stressed not to leave valuables in plain view in a vehicle.
"Arson is also trending up a little, but arson is fairly low for us," the criminal justice analyst said.

The downward trend in robbery indicates "around six (incidents) per week, which is a good number for us," he noted.

The city has taken a firm stand against crime, and part of that focuses on the cooperation of community residents. If a landlord has a tenant who continually causes trouble in the neighborhood and there are repeated service calls for assistance from sheriff's deputies, he said, the landlord will be fined for not taking control of the situation.

Landlords must take responsibility for their property, he said.

"If we can get citizens to lock their cars, they can bring crime numbers down," Kobolt said. "It goes back to securing your property and taking care of your space."

"We have software now," Kobolt said, "that allows us to (do) a time series analysis of crime data going back to Jan. 1, 2000. So we've got over 10 years of crime data now. We could say in July where hot areas will be. When we measure against ourselves, we can show where we're making progress and where we need to work."

"The real story here is (Capt.) Bob Jonsen," Kobolt said, referring to the Lancaster Sheriff's Station commander. "He knows data and how to apply it to the field, Jonsen and his whole crime management team."

"Jonsen is one of many police leaders looking at the data and basing his decisions on that."

"Police departments across the nation are beginning to make strategic and tactical decisions based on that data, instead of just their instincts," Kobolt said.

The city and law enforcement are doing everything possible to reduce crime, thereby improving the quality of life in a neighborhood, Kobolt said.

"The two main things we have to do in law enforcement," Kobolt said, is "reduce the fear of crime and reduce the actual numbers."

asemchuck@avpress.com